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BUREAU of MANA INVESTIGATION

ISSUE ISSUE



SMUDGE GARCIA

VOLUME 1 VOLUME



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"Who goes bee-dee bee-dee bee-dee?"

<BE SAFE TILL I GET HOME, KÖRLORSHA . . .>

BUREAU OF MANA INVESTIGATION
CHAPTER 2
SMUDGE - ED GARCIA

BACK COVER
FRANK GEMBECK

GUEST ILLO
TYGGER GRAF

<YOU'RE LATE, TAHEE . . .>

<I KNOW. WHAT'S HAPPENED?>

<THE USUAL.>

<BUT, MY LORD! IF THE BYTROK GUERRILLAS TAKE THE MELOSS PASS, WE STAND TO LOSE THE RESORCES OF THE VERTOG PLAINS.>

<IS THERE NOTHING WE CAN DO TO SUPPORT LORD RORSLIC?>

<NOT WITHOUT GETTING THE LESHRAK COUNCIL INVOLVED. I'M DETERMINED TO KEEP THAT FROM HAPPENING.>

<HOWEVER, WE HAVE RECEIVED A NEW SHIPMENT OF WEAPONS FROM NIVARRIA.>

<ONCE THE ELITES HAVE BEEN RETRAINED WITH THEM, I'LL SEND A SMALL DETACHMENT TO VERTOG DISGUISED AS TRIMEN REBELS.>

<WITH ANY LUCK, THEY'LL TAKE OUT THE GUERRILLAS WITHOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT BEING FOUND.>

<MY LORD, THAT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT WITH MOST OF THE ELITE TRAINERS GONE.>

<WHAT?!>

<DIDN'T YOU HEAR?>

<THE FRUIT OF YOUR LOINS SWEPT THEM AWAY. QUITE THE ORATOR, YOUR LITTLE SHARRDAN HAS BECOME.>

<YOU SHOULD HEAR HIM IN THE MARKET-PLACES. LIKE A MESSIAH TRYING TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE TO A PROMISED LAND.>

<AT FIRST THOSE WHO FOLLOWED WHERE OF NO USE TO US. ONE LESS MOUTH TO FEED.>

<BUT NOW HE SWAYS BEINGS WE NEED . . .>

<. . . SKILLED LABORS . . .>

<. . . GUARDS . . . WARRIORS . . .>

<. . . GENERALS . . .>

<LADY OF TIPPIKARRIE!>

<HE IS BEING "TAKEN CARE OF".>

<JOY . . .>

The Living Room

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I CAN GET FOR YOU, SIR?

WOULD IT BE ALL RIGHT IF I BORROWED THE PHONE?

SURE! LET ME GET IT FOR YOU.

THANKS.

HERE YOU GO, SIR.

THANK YOU.

MAYBE HOLLY'S STILL AT HOME....

HELLO, YOU HAVE REACHED AMARK AND HOLLY....

THEN AGAIN, SHE MIGHT BE WORKING OVERTIME....

I'M SORRY, I HAVEN'T SEEN HOLLY.

SHE NEVER CAME IN.

SOMETHING'S VERY WRONG HERE.

WHERE COULD SHE BE?

<WHY DO YOU PERSIST, TARLOÖM? AMARK *WILL* FIND YOU.>

AFFKLUB

<YOU PUT TOO MUCH FAITH IN YOUR BOYFRIEND.>

GOT THE TICKETS?

RIGHT HERE.

<WHY SHOULD I NOT? HE'S A VERY COMPETENT INVESTIGATOR AND YOU'RE SCARED TO DEATH OF HIM.>

<TWO-LEGGED UNICORNS SHOULDN'T EXIST.>

PERFECT!

<AND I SUPPOSE THERE ARE NO TWO-LEGGED NIGHTMARES?>

<NOPE.>

<AND WHY NOT? THEY CAN SHAPE-SHIFT CAN'T THEY?>

NOT THE BEST SEATS, THOUGH. *THOSE* SOLD BEFORE I GOT THERE.

BETTER THAN NOTHIN!

<NOT UNLESS ONE OF THE LORDS RELEASES THEIR MAGIC BONDS...>

BUT I DID GET THE CONCERT POSTER.

<I'D THINK THEY'D HAVE PROBLEMS FUNCTIONING IN YOUR SOCIETY WITHOUT HANDS.>

CHECK IT OUT.

<TARLOÖM, ARE YOU LISTENING? TARLOÖM?>

ALL RIGHT!

Nashenatu Hovercraft

Virgin Sacrifice

Zuul - In concert

WOW!

COOL!

<DAMN.>

<HA! FINDING SHARRDAN WASN'T DIFFICULT AT ALL....>

Daleport Arena

Daleport Arena


〈NOW TO REPORT MY FINDINGS TO LORD SHEILBA.〉
〈WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF YOU PURCHASED SOME TICKETS?〉


〈CRASHING THE CONCERT MIGHT ALERT THE AUTHORITIES.〉
〈YOU'RE RIGHT, TICKETS WOULD BE HANDY.〉


〈TARLOÖM! NO! WAIT . . .〉

SPITAL ENTRANCE

THANKS FOR SHOWING UP, AMARK.

I WAS IN THE AREA.

THOUGHT YOU'D STILL BE SUCKING UP TO HOLLY.

I WOULD BE IF I COULD FIND HER.

SHE'S PLAIN DISAPPEARED. NEVER EVEN SHOWED UP FOR WORK.

IT'S NOT LIKE HER.

I'M GETTING PRETTY WORRIED.

SO WHY DID YOU CALL ME IN?

ROBBERY AND ASSAULT.

INITIAL REPORTS INDICATE OUR MISSING SUCCUBUS. THAT'S WHY I WAS CALLED HERE.

THE VICTIMS WERE MINORS, HIGH SCHOOLERS. THEY GOT LUCKY. SHE ONLY ROUGHED THEM UP A BIT, MOSTLY BRUISES AND BROKEN BONES. I'D LIKE TO GET THEIR STATEMENT ON RECORD, BUT ...

YOU'RE LOUSY WITH KIDS.

BINGO! UNLESS IT'S A REAL EMERGENCY, YOKO NEEDS TO STAY AT THE STATION, ELSE I WOULD HAVE CALLED HER INSTEAD.

I HAD THE NURSES PUT THEM IN HERE TILL THEIR FOLKS SHOWED UP.

THE MEDICS HAVE ALREADY GOTTEN PERMISSION AND THEY'VE BEEN TREATED. EXCEPT FOR THE JOCK OF THE GROUP. THEY'RE STILL TRYING TO GET A HOLD OF HIS PARENTS.

GOT'CHA. ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW?

JUST ONE. THIS WAS ALL OVER CONCERT TICKETS.

TICKETS?

WHY WOULD A DEMON WANT CONCERT TICKETS?

OH, HELLO, OFFICER.

HI.

UM, HI.

HELLO.

WELL, YOU SEEM TO BE ALL RIGHT.

I'M DONE HERE, OFFICER. IF YOU NEED ME, GIVE A HOLLER AT THE DESK.

THANK YOU, MA'AM.

I KNOW YOU'RE ALL PROBABLY TIRED OF BEING ASKED THIS BY NOW, BUT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED?

DO WE EVER!

JORY HERE HAD JUST GOTTEN US THE TICKETS FOR THE NOSFERATU HOVERCRAFT CONCERT OVER IN DALEPORT.

THIS STUCK LADY CAME OUT OF NOWHERE AND DEMANDED OUR TICKETS.

OF COURSE WE TOLD HER TO SHOVE IT.

NEXT THING I KNEW, SHE WAS ALL OVER US. I THOUGHT SHE WAS GOING TO RIP US APART.

SHE GRABBED OUR TICKETS AND SPLIT.

CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THIS "STUCK" LADY LOOKED LIKE?

SASHA, YOU GOT THE BEST LOOK AT HER.

YEAH. SHE WAS GREY WITH WHITE HAIR, LONG MUZZLE, BLACK ARMS AND LEGS. KIND OF FOX-LIKE.

NOT A FOX-KIN?

NOPE. MUZZLE WAS ***WAY*** TOO LONG.

GREY-FURRED, FOX-LIKE STUCK...

DID SHE LOOK ANYTHING LIKE THIS?

THAT'S HER!

EXCEPT...

EXCEPT WHAT?

SHE HAD THREE EYES.


〈A GOLD COIN THAT NEVER EXPIRES.〉

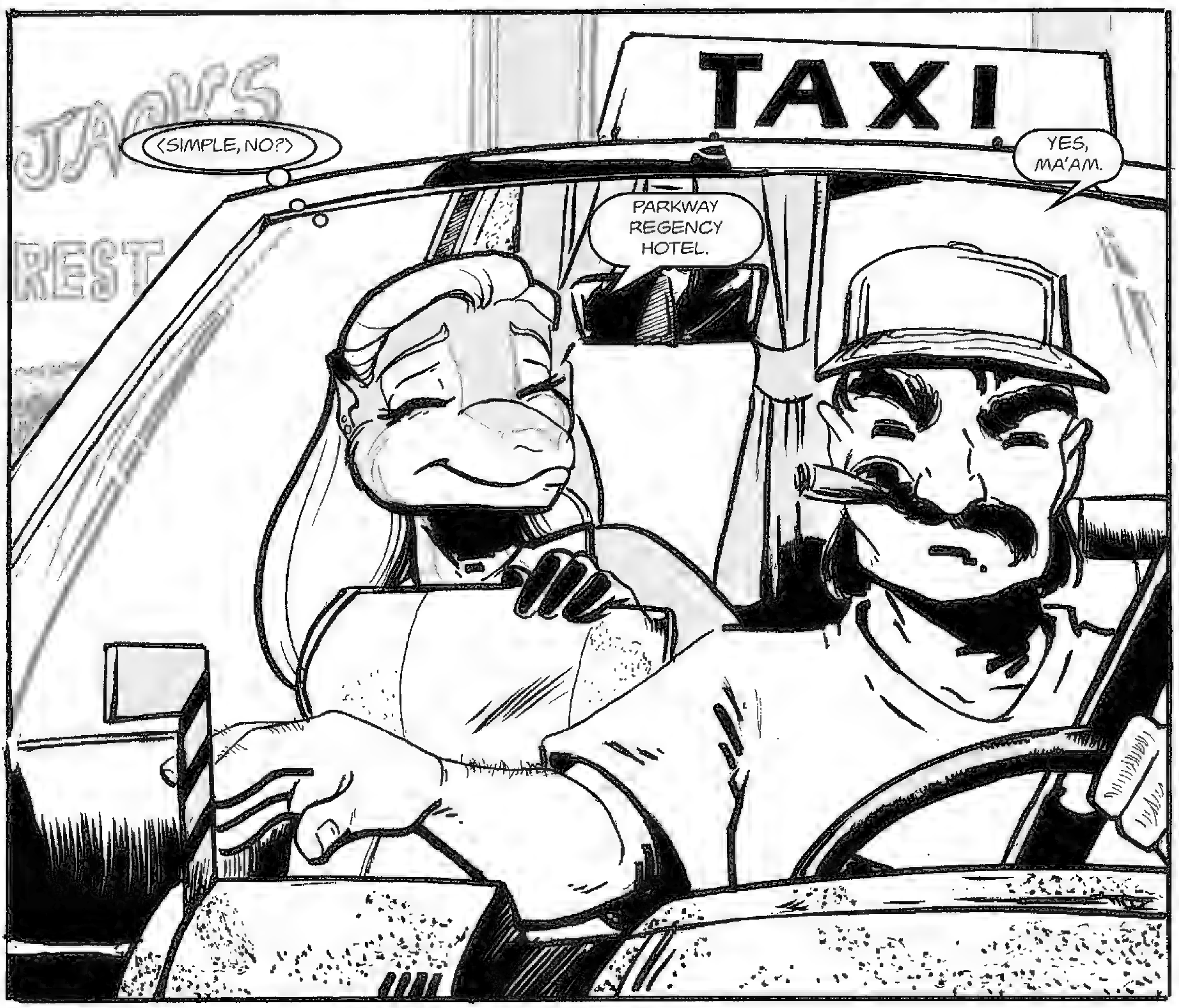

〈I LIKE IT!〉
〈IT'S NOT YOUR MONEY TO SPEND.〉


〈IT IS NOW, GIRLIE.〉


〈WELL, THIS STUFF SHOULD GET SHEILBA'S ATTENTION.〉
〈WHY ARE YOU SO DETERMINED TO BE IN LORD SHEILBA'S FAVOR, TARLOÖM?〉
〈WE BOTH KNOW THAT YOU'RE MORE SCARED OF HIM THAN YOU ARE OF AMARK.〉
〈SILLY HOLLY. DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING?〉


〈SHEILBA IS *THE* LORD. HE GRANTS POWER.〉
〈THE MORE IN FAVOR WITH HIM YOU ARE, THE MORE POWER AND PRESTIGE YOU HAVE.〉


〈THE MORE POWER YOU HAVE, THE LESS LIKELY YOU END UP BEING SACRIFICED TO KALISHKA.〉
TAXI


JJAOU'S
REST
TAXI
〈SIMPLE, NO?〉
PARKWAY REGENCY HOTEL.
YES, MA'AM.

THE SUCCUBUS POSSESSED HOLLY?

IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES SENSE, HYGRON.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HER GO LAST NIGHT...

YOUR MOPING AIN'T GONNA HELP HER.

HOLLY ALWAYS STRUCK ME AS BRIGHT.

THINK SHE'D TRY AND TALK THE SUCCUBUS INTO DOING SOMETHING STUPID?

CERTAINLY! THOUGH WHAT, I HAVEN'T A CLUE.

ON TOP OF THAT, WHY WOULD A DEMON STEAL TICKETS TO A ROCK CONCERT? IT DOESN'T FIT THE PROFILE. THEY'VE DONE SOME PRETTY STRANGE THINGS IN THE PAST, BUT THIS ONE TAKES THE CAKE.

CAN I BORROW YOUR PHOTO OF HOLLY?

SURE.

LT. BUTTERCUP. LINE 8.

I'LL GET THIS UP ON THE NET. SEE IF ANYONE ELSE SPOTS HER.

GOOD.

LT. BUTTERCUP. LINE 8.

LT. AMARK BUTTERCUP, BUREAU OF MANA INVESTIGATION.

HEY AMARK! I HAVE A PHONE CALL FROM MEGA-SHAMMARK SAVINGS AND LOAN. DO YOU WANT IT PATCHED THROUGH?

UH... YEAH.

HELLO, MR. BUTTERCUP?

YES?

I'M SORRY FOR DISTURBING YOU LIKE THIS...

...BUT YOUR ACCOUNT IS SHOWING UNUSUAL AND EXCESSIVE ACTIVITY TODAY.

SAX, $550.37; TOULOUSE EXOTIC, $1,021.42; GOLDEN ARCH, $10.91; PARKWAY REGENCY, $1,204.00; FOOD 4 SALE, $952.82; AND BRIGADOON SHOES, $2594.78.

DID YOU AUTHORIZE THESE CHARGES?

THAT'S IT!

THE CREDIT CARD! OF COURSE!

SIR?!?

DID YOU SAY ONE OF THE PLACES WAS A HOTEL?

YES SIR, THE PARKWAY REGENCY.

SIR, DO YOU WISH A STOP PAYMENT?

YES, PLEASE.

HYGRON!

WHAT?!

HOW SOON CAN YOU GET A SEARCH WARRANT?

TUT SUITE. THOUGHT OF SOMETHING?

I THINK HOLLY SOMEHOW CONNED THE SUCCUBUS INTO OVER SPENDING ON OUR JOINT ACCOUNT CREDIT CARD.

ONE OF THE PURCHASES WAS FOR A ROOM AT THE PARKWAY REGENCY. WITH ANY LUCK, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO TRAP HER THERE.


〈THINGS ARE NEVER SIMPLE, TARLOÖM.〉
〈I WOULDN'T SAY THAT. THIS ENTIRE TRIP, THINGS HAVE JUST FALLEN INTO MY LAP.〉
〈DON'T EXPECT THAT TO LAST.〉
〈I DON'T. JUST LONG ENOUGH TO FINISH WHAT I STARTED HERE.〉


〈YOU KNOW, HOLLY, YOU'VE BEEN A REAL BIG HELP TO ME, WHETHER YOU WANTED TO OR NOT.〉
SHE'S ENTERING NOW, SIR.
TA


〈AFTER EVERYTHING'S SAID AND DONE, I JUST MIGHT LET YOU GO.〉


DING
〈GEE, THANKS.〉

〈IS SOMEONE JUST A BIT SPITEFUL?〉

〈YOU MADE ME BEAT THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS OUT OF FOUR CHILDREN!〉

〈OF COURSE I'M SPITEFUL!〉

〈WHY SHOULD YOU CARE? THEY WEREN'T YOURS.〉

CLICK

〈AFTER AMARK FINDS YOU, I HOPE THE JUDGE THROWS AWAY THE KEY.〉

〈BITCH, BITCH, BITCH.〉

〈NOT MUCH ELSE FOR ME TO DO EXCEPT BITCH.〉

〈YOU GOT THAT RIGHT.〉

FREEZE! BMI!

AMARK! YOU'RE ON!

HA!

Spirit not of body...

Intruder not of soul...

(NO!)

(YES!)

I summon you before me.

Alien snatcher without form, Relinquish what you have stolen.

CLONCK

(NO!)

UGH!

(YOU CAN'T HAVE HER!)

Come forth 'O Possessor!

WHACK

I break the ties in a SMACK

(SHE'S MINE!)

<Push!>

CRASH

〈WHAT?!?〉
SHIT!

HYGRON!

THUNCK

<TARLOÖM, GIVE IT UP!>

THA-WHACK

<YOU CAN'T DEFEAT HIM!>

SNATCH

AUGH!

WHAM

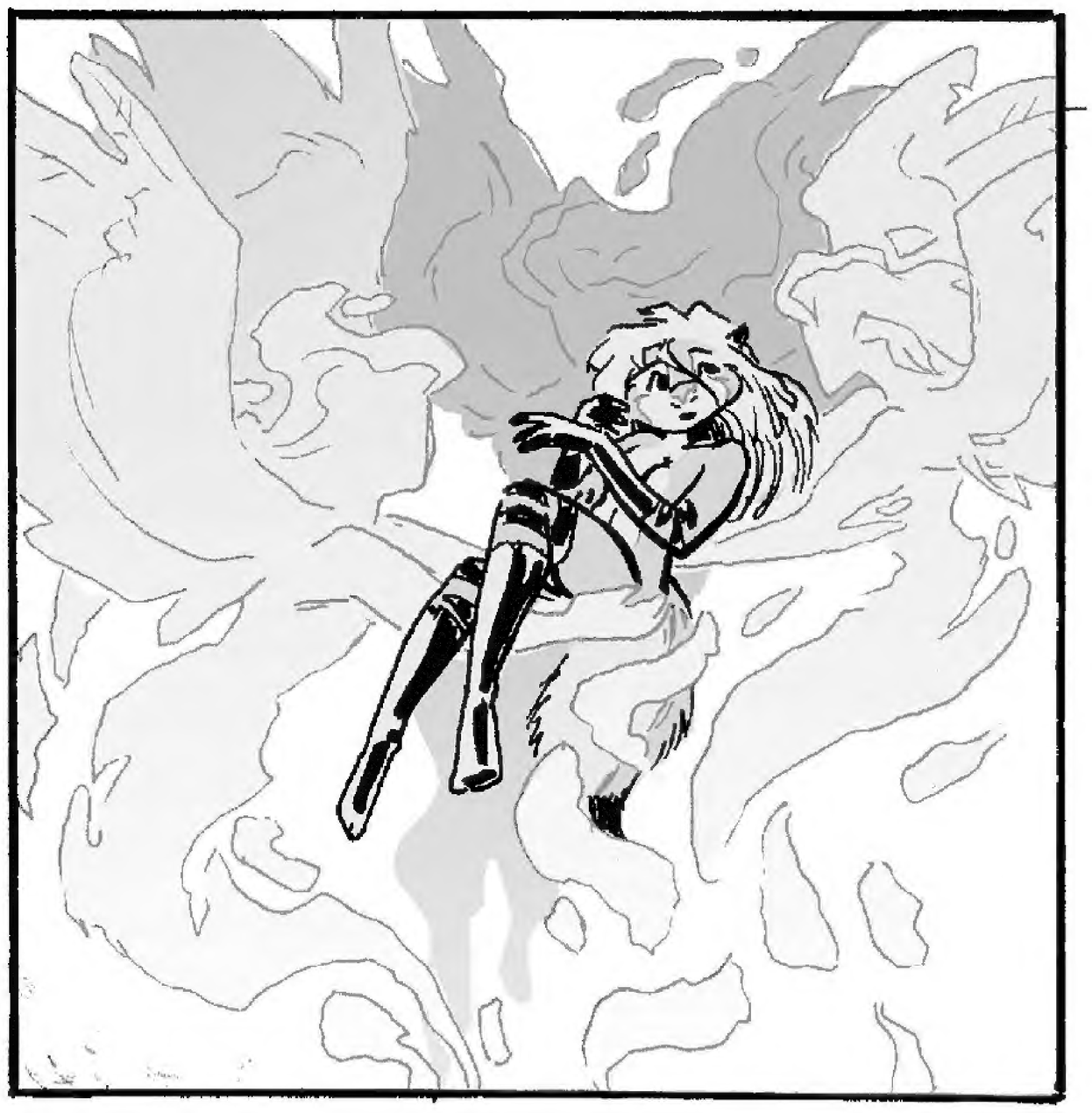


<YOU WANT HOLLY, UNICORN?>

<COME AND GET HER!>

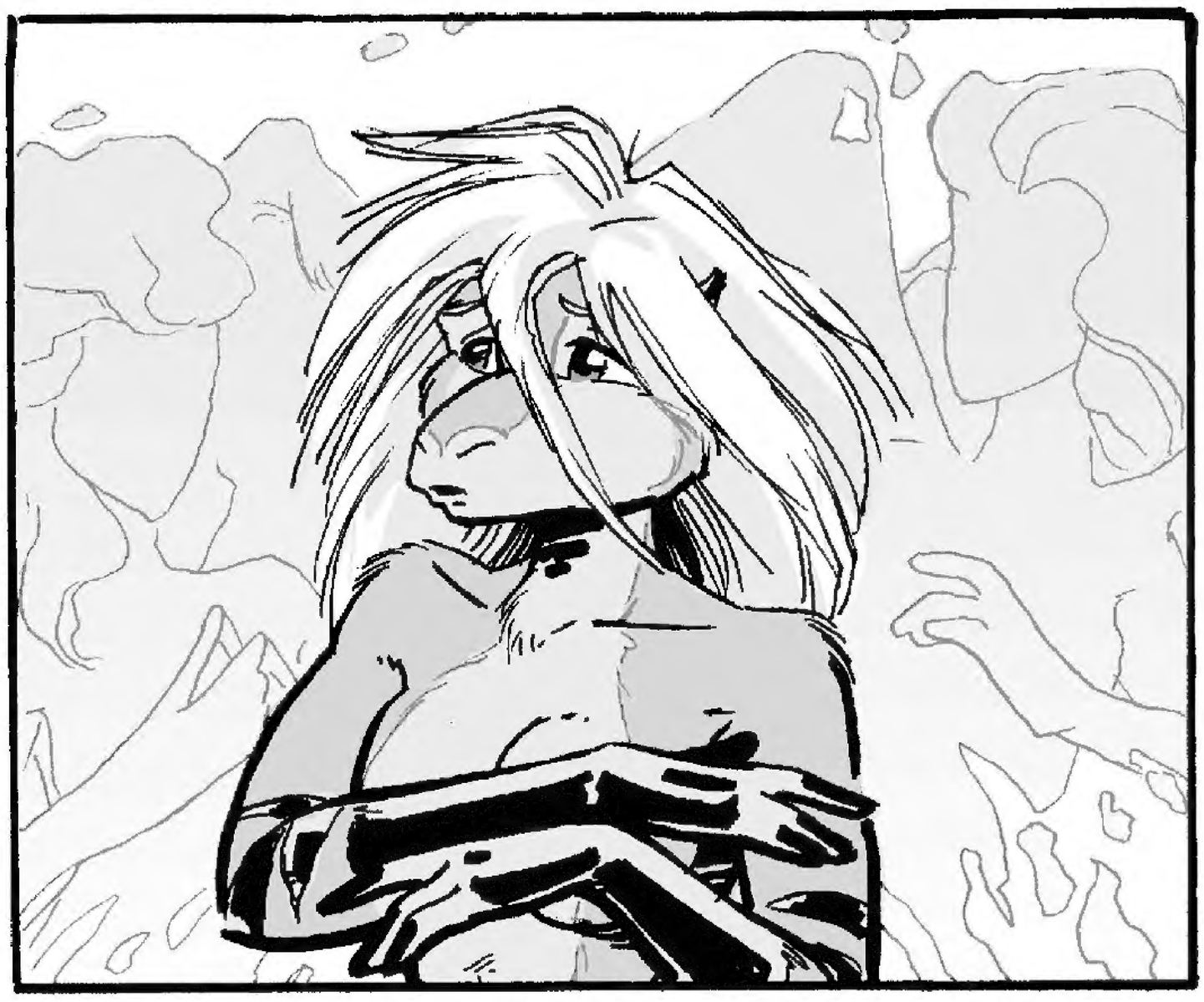

Daughters of wind and water, I beg thy help!






HUH?

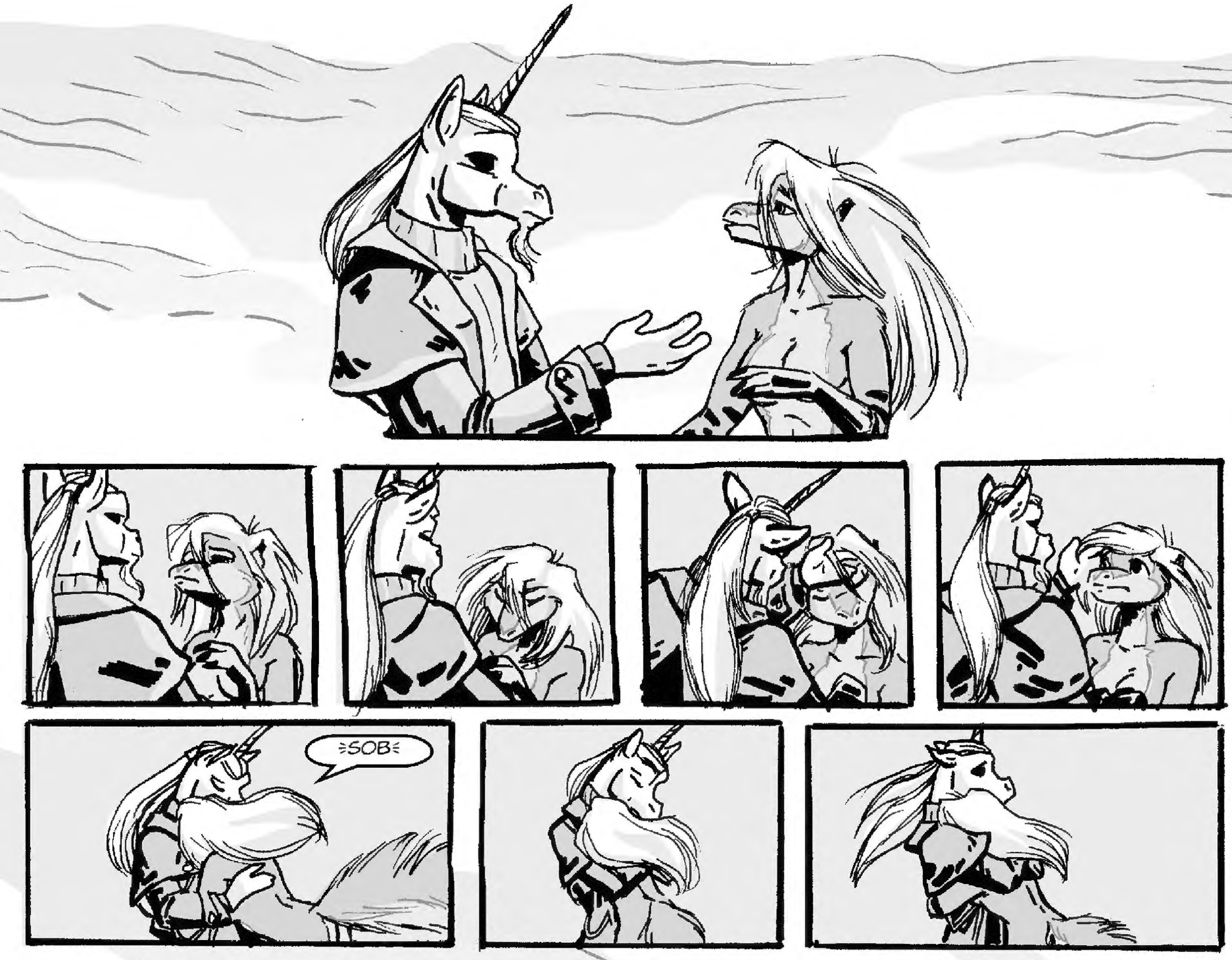


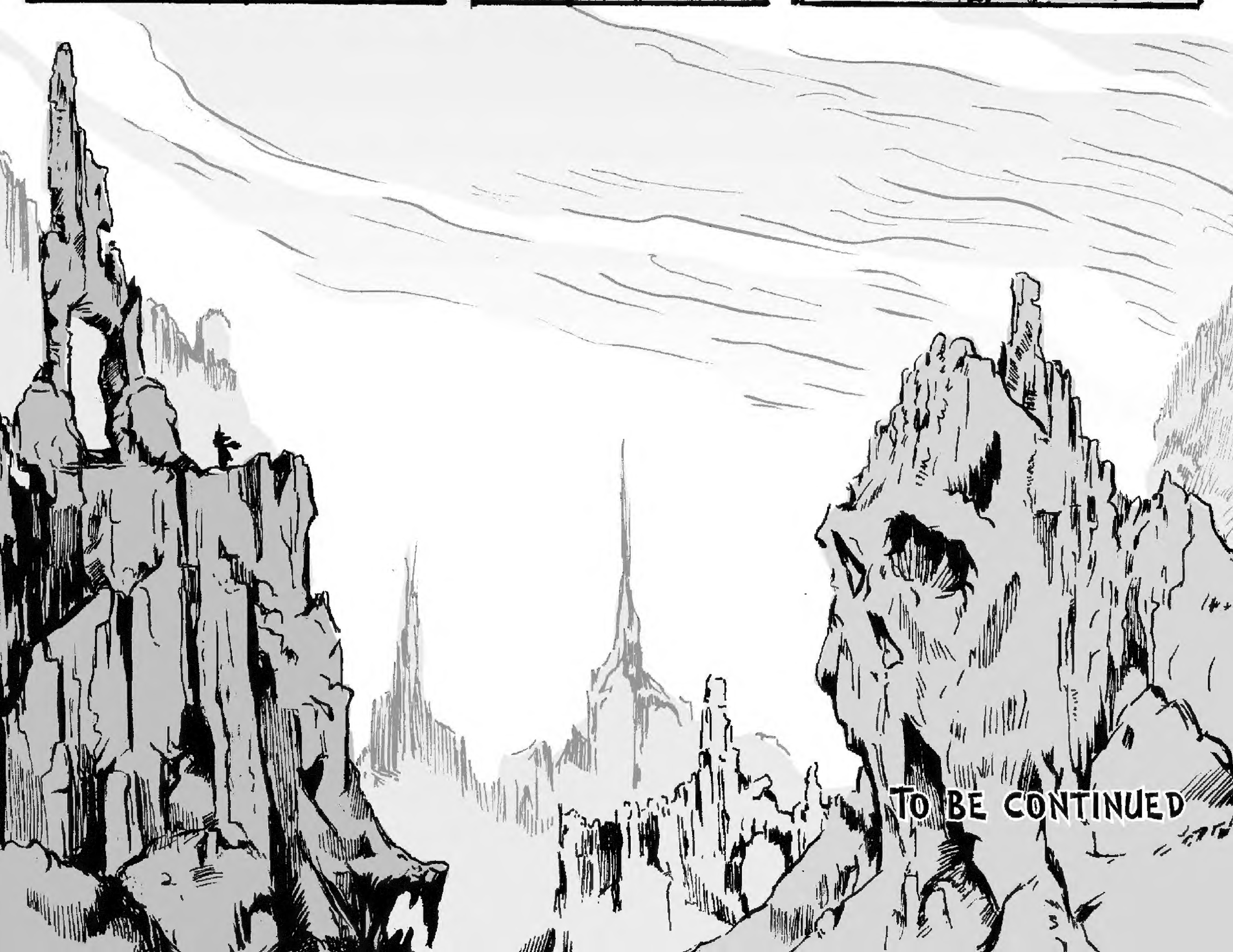









=SOB=


TO BE CONTINUED

Were-creatures

(Or what the hell is Holly anyway?)

By Smudge and Dave Bryant

Like much of the early history of Nivarria's peoples, the origins of were-folk are murky to modern science. Most theories center around what some archaeologists dub the Were Empire. Its very existence is hotly debated, but, in truth, it did exist and was, in its prime, the mightiest nation in the world. It was not a pleasant home for any but its rulers—were-folk, in ancient days including all Caucasian humans.

Hatred among those ground under the lycanthropes' heel simmered over centuries. Finally another power aided a rebellion that erupted into civil war, and the were-folk were overthrown. There was chaos and revenge; a mighty curse trapped the former lycanthropes in their human bodies. With the fall of the Were Empire four thousand years ago came the end of the Age of Myth.

Toward the end of the succeeding Age of Legend, one individual rose to such prominence in the trade city of Daleport that he is remembered in monuments and schoolbooks. Dis, a were-panther, fled scandal in his homeland and wandered for years before reaching Daleport and establishing himself as a partner in a newly rebuilt inn. With his shrewd business sense and unmatched culinary flair, the inn's kitchens quickly became popular.

Some time later a half-mad were-tiger, his name unknown, appeared and rampaged by night, mauling those whose lycanthropy lay dormant and leaving them to struggle with the consequences. There was confusion and concern; few understood what was happening, and they had no wish to share their knowledge. Dis pieced events together and with typical discretion sought the "afflicted" to teach them to master their newfound dual nature.

Dis counseled calm in private to his "students" and in public to the town at large. A population of were-folk sprang up, scattered throughout Daleport, and Dis became revered as a peacemaker and teacher—albeit with a note of irony, for he also challenged and killed the were-tiger. The island of tolerance drew other were-folk, and even today Daleport is a major concentration of lycanthrope population and subculture.

With the passing of the Age of Legend two thousand years ago went the magic. Lycanthropy faded into the past and its existence came to be doubted. It is only in the last century, as the magic has begun to return and to be rediscovered, that were-folk have begun to reappear. Interestingly, in the modern era mauling by a lycanthrope does not trigger latent lycanthropy.

Prior to puberty, a child exhibits no sign of his or her lycanthropy, being indistinguishable from any other human child. As well, the animal form of a lycanthrope is not determined genetically and instead seems to depend on poorly understood correspondences to the individual's personality at the time of emergence.

Human intelligence is retained in animal form, though not without cost. The animal form seems to have a measure of consciousness, including instincts; failure to integrate this alien partial personality can lead to severe mental illness, the primary reason intervention and instruction are so vital. Physical coordination must be relearned in the new form, and human speech is effectively impossible.

A previously unknown phenomenon that has manifested only since the magic returned are the lycanthropes informally called "stuck". Unlike more typical were-folk, who switch between human or animal bodies, these individuals are "stuck" somewhere in the middle from birth. They cannot transform and instead possess humanoid bodies with fur, tails, and head shapes derived from animals—sometimes multiple animals.

Holly Anders is such a "stuck": her body mixes and matches wolf and tiger into a predominantly fox-human hybrid. Thanks to history, though, she is classified as a Caucasian human for the purposes of government programs and agencies.



